THE WURTS BROTHERS AND THE DISCOVERY OF ANTRHACITE COAL IN CARBONDALE

The Wurts family was of Swiss origin and had settled in Flanders, New Jersey, as early as the late eighteenth century, for four of the brothers (William, Maurice, Charles Stewart and John) were all born at Flanders between 1783 and 1792. At the time of the War of 1812, these brothers were residents of Philadelphia, and Maurice and William were partners in a dry goods business in that city, and supplied clothing to the army during the War of 1812. Charles Stewart Wurts was not a member of the firm but joined in about the year 1819. John Wurts, the youngest of the brothers, was born in 1792 and was admitted to the bar in Philadelphia on October 2, 1816. During the following ten years he served in the Pennsylvania Legislature and in the United States Congress. All in all, these four brothers occupied important and highly respectable positions in the business life of Philadelphia at this time.

The shortage of fuel--bituminous coal--for manufacturing purposes in Philadelphia, caused by the War of 1812, stimulated William and Maurice Wurts, about the year 1814, to turn their attention to the discovery of some substitute for the bituminous coal that could no longer be obtained from England. Almost immediately, although the precise date has not been ascertained, William began to explore the Pennsylvania streams and forests for coal, his first trip taking him into the Pocono Marsh district and proving unsuccessful. Then he sought the Lackawanna Valley in search of the stone coal that reports indicated could be found there, even though it was so lightly rated by the valley people. Both William and Maurice were interested in these explorations, but the preliminary inspections seem to have been made by William, Maurice being called in from time to time for consultation or when important purchases of land known to contain anthracite were contemplated. Together they purchased such lands at various points in the Lackawanna valley for prices ranging from fifty cents to three dollars an acre, working their way northward with chain and compass and at times lost to sight and knowledge in what was then a wild and unsettled region. During all these explorations